



Hereditary Transmission of
Mental Qualities, as exemplified
by Boys in Reformatory Schools.
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Lord Bacon, in his essay on "Nature in Man" says "Nature is often hidden, sometimes overcome, seldom extinguished", and the truth of these words is nowhere more exemplified than in the histories of the youthful offenders who find their way to our Reformatory Schools. An act was passed in the year 1866, whereby all offenders over ten and under sixteen years of age, who are convicted of an offence punishable with penal servitude may be sent to a certified Reformatory School. Last year there were admitted into the various Reformatory Schools in Scotland 233 boys of whom no fewer than 208 were convicted of theft and housebreaking, so that nearly all were habit and repeat thieves. My experience as Medical Officer to the Parkhead (Boys) Reformatory for the last eleven years has led me to take a deep interest in the physical, mental, and moral training of the boys, not only with regard to its bearing on health and disease, but also as involving a highly important social question. However de-

pressing the subject may seem it is certainly interesting, for many of these boys are not only themselves thieves but the sons of thieves, and even in some cases the grandsons of thieves. To trace the transmission of this evil from parent to son, to point out its development in their brains, and above all, to solve the problem how this propensity may be overcome and extinguished shall be the object of our Thesis. Most assuredly if the hereditary tendency be proved the delinquent ought not to be treated as a common law-breaker, but should receive such careful management as may be suitable for the disease. Disease it is. Born and reared in the sloughs and dens of our large cities and towns the mimetic qualities of these boys are only developed in the direction of crime, and soon this evil becomes so grafted into their systems that its eradication seems almost hopeless, and they are reckoned as habit and repute or hereditary thieves. With such unfortunate surroundings, the potentialities of these boys are never direct

ed towards the higher and nobler life, and hence their state is exactly similar to that of caste in India. "A large proportion of the disorderly and reckless boys who throng our railway stations and hang about our crossings are left at liberty to ply their trade of begging and petty pilfering till qualified to graduate as thieves and prepared for the gaol and reformatory". (Blue Book, 1865. Report of H. M. Insp. of Reformatories). If, then, this downward course is to be interrupted, these children must be rescued and removed before their memory or their conscience is fully developed, in short, before they acquire moral responsibility. But, if such institutions be adopted, they must be really homes, the only qualification for admission being poverty and neglect — the office of the magistrate and the policeman being at all times unnecessary. This is certainly the principle on which that true philanthropist acts — Mr. William Quarrier — with so much success. Just at the period when their mimetic powers are most impressible

these children are carried from a home of want and neglect to one of plenty and comfort; from a home of dirt and disease to one of cleanliness and health; from a home where selfishness, distrust, filth and vice are ever apparent to one of healthful purity; from the gutter to the green fields - from hatred to love. With such a training their chances in life are immeasurably improved, for, of all attempts at the elevation of the masses this must be reckoned the most hopeful. There are at present 300 boys in the Institution, nearly all of whom are thieves, and these I propose to divide into three different classes.

- I. Those who are led into crime through accident or some other unfortunate circumstance.
- II. The common thief.
- III. The Hereditary thief.

Class I. - There are about 150 boys in the first class, almost all of whom are the sons of drunken parents, and the chief causes of their bad conduct are starvation, neglect or the absence of restraint and environment (Dugdale). It is generally

with regard to the training of this class, that it is so often alleged that the influence for good exerted by the Reformatory School is more than counterbalanced by the contaminating example of the baser sort. This might reasonably be the case if the majority of the boys were of the lowest class, but this, as I have already shown, is not so, and hence our experience is that the really bad, mean, or dirty boy is generally despised. Not only so, but the code of propriety is sometimes so high that that those even with a bad record have been known to use physical force to prevent mis-doing.

The work of training and reforming the boys of this class is a comparatively hopeful and easy one, for we simply remove the cause and cure the disease by separating them from contaminating example and parental control.

A. B., whose only parent was a drunken mother, was committed to an Industrial School for four years for stealing. After the expiry of his sentence, he was handed over to his mother who had not given out

his debauched habits, and who left him to beg or steal. Again convicted, he was sentenced to our Reformatory for five years. Being well behaved and strictly honest, he acted as messenger boy to the Institution and was licensed after three years' detention, but so much afraid was he that he might again lapse into crime that he never visited his friends or former haunts but straight way enlisted, and is now an officer in the army.

C. D. has an ~~exactly~~ exactly similar history. He also enlisted and is now a sergeant. His only brother is an inmate of the Institution at the present day.

Our failures in this class have all arisen from the boys returning to their former homes.

In the Blue Book for 1870, Sydney Turner, Inspector of Reformatories, writes, "In many cases the best efforts of the managers have been defeated by the selfish ignorance or greediness of the parents, in not allowing them to go to a situation, or in persuading them to leave their situations

to come home, and again to be turned out to the streets after their small savings are spent and clothes disposed of. It is scarcely possible", he says, "to devise an effective remedy for this, short of investing the managers with a legal right of guardianship over the inmates for a reasonable time (say for a year) after the expiration of their sentence of detention.

Class II. - The Common Thief.

Happily those who comprise this class in the Institution are in the minority, for the work of reforming is extremely difficult and hopeless. Regarding our first class we pointed out that many were thieves through starvation but no such excuse can be made on behalf of the Common Thief. He will not work. He steals through greed or gain merely to gratify his desires in the easiest way possible. Like the drunken sot who cannot pass the public house if he has anything in his pockets the Common Thief never misses an opportunity of feeding his low propensity. We have two very typical examples in the Reformatory at present.

Should the Governors rifle their pockets
ever so frequently within 24 hours they
are again filled with slate pencils, pens,
match or blacking-boxes, balls, &c, which
they have pilfered at every available oppor-
tunity. They seem to be incorrigible, and
in order to protect society, they should be
detained in some reformatory and made
to work for their living, until they show
signs of willingness to become law-abiding
subjects. They are advanced offenders and
ought to be subjected to severe and coercive
discipline. Colonel Inglis, H. M. Inspector,
seems to hold the same opinion, for, in
his General report in the year 1883, he
writes, "We occasionally come across cases
both in boys' and girls' reformatories where
the chances of reformation appear almost
hopeless, and where the conduct and
example of the delinquents are working
such evil to their school fellows as
can scarcely be exaggerated. The
only way I can see out of the difficulty
is for Government to establish one or
more Penal Reformatories, to which in-
corrigibles could be committed at the

request of managers, and where they could be retained until they showed signs of amendment. The treatment in those schools should be strictly deterrent, in fact they should be managed on the ordinary rules of prison discipline. I am convinced that in many cases a very short term of detention with the knowledge that a repetition of bad conduct would result in a re-commitment for a longer period, would effect a cure.

III. Class III - The Hereditary Thief.

I have already pointed out that many boys of the first class steal because they are hungry, that the boys of the second class steal to gratify their desires and necessities in the easiest manner possible, but the boys of the third class steal because they cannot help it. One of this class with a bad family record entered one of the rooms in the Institution and stole the only article he could lay his hands upon, viz., a single glove. He could not withstand the temptation although the article was of no use to him. Apparently the tendency

was in born. Just as the enthusiast in music, through early, constant, and continuous study, becomes a master, so, in this case, the faculty of acquisitiveness is developed at the expense of the other and more amiable qualities. Like all mono-maniacs, his insanity is more or less partial, in such a way, that one passion or idea so entirely possesses the patient as to lead him into more or less reprehensible conduct. A fixed idea seems to overcome the will, which the brain, from its diseased condition, fails to correct. How is this acquired? We answer (1) Heredity fixes the organic characteristics of the boy, and (2) His early training develops these characteristics.

Galton wrote his book on "Hereditary Genius" to demonstrate how frequently the higher qualities are transmitted from parent to child. In our own village (Tollcross) there is a family living who through four generations have attained a more than local reputation as players of the violin. Mr. R. L. Dugdale

of New York traces the history of the "Dukes" family through seven generations, extending over a period of seventy-five years. With what result? He found that that family, comprising 1200 individuals, had cost the State of New York no less a sum than one million and a quarter of dollars through their crime, insanity, and pauperism. If the good qualities are transmitted, why not the bad? Both conditions are recognised in the Scriptures, for they speak of "visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generations", and St. Paul recognises the other quality, for he writes, "When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice, and I am persuaded that in thee also".

In the book already mentioned, "Hereditary Genius", Galton arrives at this result, that one in five thousand of nature men in the great age of Athens was in such a sense distinguished that to this hour we are proud to make

these men our teachers in philosophy, poetry, and art. He asks, "How did this Athenian greatness decline? Because," he replies, "the mothers of the incoming population were a heterogeneous class." So it was during the rise of the Roman Empire the great men obtained their greatness by obedience to natural law. With looseness of life came in the various forms of intellectual imbecility. Tracing the histories of these boys, is not the lesson and the result the same? No fewer than 148 of those at present in attendance were born and reared in the lowest quarters of our large towns in Scotland and England. Rottenness is the mother of littleness in the brain as well as in the body; for the pigmy is always born of disloyalty to natural law.

"Men's deeds", says Bacon, "are often as they have been accustomed". Darwin in his book on the "Descent of Man" teaches that man comes to feel that it is best for him to obey his more persistent instincts, while in the same connections

he declares that the wish for another man's property is perhaps as persistent a desire as any that can be named. Professor Ribot defines Instinct as "an unconscious mode of intelligence", and he very pointedly adds that "It is possible that instincts are only habits fixed by heredity." Just as when man has tamed a wild horse to obey him there will go on among the descendants of that horse a silent conflict between the two hereditaries — the one trying to fix the acquired habits and the other trying to preserve the primitive instinct. Now, as every instinct has a certain pleasure connected with its gratification, it follows that the strength of any instinct depends (1) on the persistency of the desire it represents, and (2) on the vividness with which pleasures or pains arising from its gratification may be recalled. It is an interesting fact that our painful sensations are reproduced less easily than our pleasurable; — just as the painful sensations arising from hunger cannot be easily recalled to memory.

after the desire for food has been Satisfied. These boys, therefore, can recall the pleasure they enjoyed in stealing much more vividly than the pains or penalties they suffered as law-breakers.

The information derived from statistics bearing on Hereditary Criminals is always defective and inaccurate. The facts regarding the family histories of our boys have been carefully gathered by the Governor, Schoolmaster, and myself. I may remark, however, that every attempt to obtain the histories of their relatives is beset with difficulties, for I have always noticed that these boys resent any reference to the degradation of their parents or their homes, even in the way of pity. Among the boys at present in the Institution, there are no fewer than 45 who have brothers, sisters, parents, or Grandparents known to the police as thieves; not only so but it has been ascertained that the same den in the same locality has been occupied by some member of the same family for generations. This gives us an average of 22.5%. The number of boys

whom, from their conduct past and present and from their family history, we would reckon Common thieves is nineteen, making the number of boys in my second and third classes 64 or an average of 32 per cent. Now, I think this is extremely interesting, when we compare this with the results of Reformatory training as published in the Government Blue Books. During the years 1883, 1884, and 1885, there were discharged from the Scotch Reformatories 184 boys — of these 107 were known to be doing well, 5 died, 8 were doubtful, and no fewer than 60 were re-convicted of crime, giving the results that 60 per cent were doing well, and 33 per cent re-convicted. Now when speaking of the boys of the first class — viz., the accidental thieves — I pointed out that they formed our largest class, and were the most hopeful scholars, while the common thieves were in the minority and they were the least hopeful. Is not the result or coincidence most remarkable when we consider that the facts

obtained from their family histories are almost identical with those obtained regarding their conduct after discharge?

The authors who have contributed most largely to the Criminal Statistics are Mr. R. L. Dugdale of the Prison Association of New York, and D. Bruce Thomson, Surgeon to the General Prison of Scotland. The percentages obtained by these writers are much larger and cannot be compared with mine, because they enumerate both sexes, and include all crime, whereas I am dealing with boys only who are guilty of the crime of theft.

If the hereditary nature of the crime of theft be considered remarkable, still more so is the fact that the direction of this crime pursued by the son is sometimes exactly similar to that pursued by the father.

E. F. with a bad family record was committed to our Reformatory for five years for watch watching - habit and repute. He was a very amiable but a very small boy. The Gardener at that time was

a "Canny" Aberdonian to whose case this remarkable prodigy was handed over. "F", says the Gardener, one day, "they tell me that you were very good at stealing folk's watches, but I have just been thinking the man would be sleeping when he allowed the like of you to rob him". "Andrew", says the bright little fellow, "if you'll promise not to blow" (that is, not to inform the Governor) "I'll steal your watch before dinner". "Agreed", says Andrew, "but remember, if I catch you attempting to steal it, I'll have you punished". When the bell was ringing for dinner, F. whispers to the Gardener, "Andrew, do you not think the bell too soon?" when the latter found that his watch had been snatched. But here the farce does not end. When Andrew demanded his watch from the supposed thief, he declared he had no watch - He was stripped and searched, but no watch was found. Threats and promises were of no avail, and poor Andrew was beginning to think he had seen the last of his faithful verge. Besides he himself well knew that he

had infringed one of the most important regulations of the Institution, so that even if he were willing he durst not blot. After some time it was given back to him by another boy to whom I had handed it, thus showing, not only I's dexterity in snatching the watch, but his cuteness in safely planting (hiding) it.

The direction of the crime in G. H. lay in housebreaking. He belonged to a family famous as housebreakers. He was a splendid fellow and was one of the most trusted boys in the Institution. Though he never attempted to abscond himself he was once overheard cheering a homesick companion by declaring that he could show him how to effect his escape by no fewer than "nine cracks" in other words, nine ways by which he might abscond. The above mentioned Gardener formed a close friendship with this boy and one afternoon the former sent him to the village for some tobacco but at the same time neglected to give him the key. On his return he found he was locked out and must there-

fore enter by the main door. Not at all. the opportunity for practising his beloved accomplishment was too good to be lost, so he scaled the wall three stories high, crossed over the roof, and appeared at Andrews' window, much to that poor man's consternation and alarm. He seemed most anxious to reform, and he begged the Governor not to allow him out of the premises on leave, for he confessed that on every occasion on which he had been allowed out to visit his friends he had been guilty of house-breaking, though he had carried little or nothing away as booty at any time.

If it be granted, then, that a man may transmit to his offspring certain mental qualities, such as a mania for theft, the question arises: Wherein does this hereditary tendency differ from that acquired by the party himself? In order to answer this question satisfactorily it will be necessary for me to refer to the close analogy which I consider I have fairly established between certain classes of drunkards and certain classes of thieves. Among the former we have the habitual

drunkard and the dipsomaniac. In distinguishing between these two, Dr. Sibbald points out that in true dipsomania there is a fundamental condition — a pathological condition of the brain, which manifests itself irrespective of any external circumstances of temptation, whereas, in habitual drunkenness, the craving consists mainly in a desire to keep up a condition of stimulation to which the brain has become accustomed. This habit is the result merely of a compliance with a vicious custom, and hence there is no periodicity or independence of external circumstances in the symptoms, as is found in true dipsomania. In other words, the habitual drunkard, like the common thief, indulges his propensity at all times; the one to keep up a certain vicious custom of stimulation, the other to gratify his desires and necessities in the easiest way possible. In either case the victim may have no one to blame but himself. On the other hand the dipsomaniac suffers from a certain pathological condition of the brain, and is in great

measure not responsible for his actions, while the hereditary chief (to use Darwin's phrase) "yields obedience to his most persistent instinct."

Two of my patients afford examples of dipsomania in which the periodicity and the absence of external influence are so exceedingly well marked, that I am tempted to give their cases here.

J. K. is an intelligent mechanic: the father of a large family of sons, all of whom have been total abstainers from their childhood. Naturally of a cheery disposition, whenever the attack approaches, his manner loses its frankness and affability. He becomes morose, sad, and very thoughtful. His sleep is restless — he gets up frequently during the night and smokes incessantly. During this stage were he offered drink in any form he would angrily refuse it — for evidently a silent conflict is going on within him. At last he tastes, and continues to drink, till he reaches the land of horrors. Whenever his family observe this change in his conduct.

they feel that Calamity is advancing, and they "tread softly," as if some one were on his death bed. During the intervals he has not the slightest desire for strong drinks.

L.M.: Aged 58, is also a mechanic. Here the premonitory symptoms are very different from those of the last case. He is cross, restless, talks to every person about his reformation. He is fond of attending certain meetings, at which he describes his victory over the drink curse. His employer informs me that whenever poor M. demands an increase of wages on the score that now he has given over his drunken habits an outbreak is imminent. On one occasion his wife watched and followed him for fourteen days, but all to no purpose, for at the end of that time, he left her in a tramway car, entered a public house, and drank till he was drunk. Now like the suicidal maniac rushing to his own destruction.

I often wonder if those who are loud in their condemnation of the long life drunkard have ever thoughtfully considered the

subject, ever attempted to search out the Genesis or trace the development of the drinking habit? Have they known the temptation, ere they judged the crime?

I am convinced that the mania of thieving operates in exactly the same way. The hereditary thief leads an honest life for a variable time - no matter how strong the temptation or environment may be, but this propensity will revive so long as the victim cannot assert his self-control. I have carefully examined the Blue Books for many years back, and have been amused at the reports by the Inspectors, wherein they deplore and grieve over the re-conviction of some of their most promising boys.

The only reason they advance in explanation is the influence of bad companions. This may be the case with some, but I have a far higher idea of the thoroughness and success of Reformatory training than admit that the whole 33 per cent could be so influenced. Still more conclusive is the evidence of the Governors and Schoolmasters, when they report that the

evil propensity in many of the boys seems to be "scotched" not killed.

How are we to distinguish between the person who suffers from that form of insanity, characterized by an irresistible desire to steal, and the hereditary thief? We have attempted to prove that the diseases in many aspects are exactly similar. In the one case the disease is constitutional, in the other it is acquired from ancestry. When the unhappy sufferer of the one phase of the disease is brought before the judge, he becomes an object of pity and kindly interest, whereas if one of our poor boys be found in the same position, he is despised and punished severely - and yet they have sinned alike: they both suffer from different forms of the same disease, one of which is curable, the other is not, but the one is rich and has many friends, the other is poor and friendless.

Having now shown that this mania is often "hidden", sometimes "overcome", we have still to consider how it may be

altogether "extinguished". The homicidal maniac, for the public safety, is confined during Her Majesty's pleasure, but these boys are born and trained to wage reckless warfare against society with no correction except the expensive and unsatisfactory machinery of prison discipline. Their prospect in life is dark, dismal, and sickening. D.

Bruce Thomson, in the Journal of Mental Science says "Scarcely one of them can be said to die of one disease, for almost every organ of the body is more or less diseased; and the wonder to me is that life could have been supported in such a diseased frame. Their moral nature seems equally diseased with their physical frame; and whilst their mode of life in prison re-animates their physical health, I doubt whether their minds are equally benefited, if improved at all. But Maudsley, in his "Physiology and Pathology of the Mind", appears to afford us a distinct ray of hope: for he teaches that the Mind or Will does not reach its full

growth till between the thirtieth and thirty-third years, and is entirely dependent for its outward realization upon that mechanism of automatic action which is gradually organized in the subordinate centres - the cultivation of the senses are necessary antecedents to the due formation and operation of the will." In other words, up to that age the Mind or Will is modifiable - for so long as you have growth you can have change. Again, Dr. Hecison, in his "Vital Statistics," found that age affected the tendency to crime in a most remarkable degree, and that the maximum proportion was found between the ages of twenty and twenty-five - and that then it decreased gradually. Here, then, is the key-note to our treatment. Reverting again to our analogy - between the dipsomaniac and the hereditary thief, we shall find that even in treatment the diseases are exactly similar. No treatment has been so successful with the former as Enforce total abstinence in a quiet family or

Home for Inebriates - and there can be little chance of amendment in the thief except in some place where there is little to entice from the path of honour and honesty, and where he can enjoy the "Glorious privilege of being independent." "Don't let me out," said one of the best boys that ever lived, "or I will steal." If there be no Home for these poor sufferers, then let us induce them to join the army or navy where the cleverness of the watch-snatches and the determination and strategy of the housebreakers may ^{be cultivated} in a nobler and more useful sphere, where, while learning to fight the battles of their Queen and Country, they may yet be able to achieve their grandest triumph by wresting themselves free from their well bound fetters, and before old age with its diseased body creeps upon them let them retrieve the past and not only save themselves from the awful record of a wasted life, but also save their countrymen from the sad spectacle of families of

criminals passing before them in never-
ending succession from the cradle
to the grave.

In Conclusion let me state
that the religious aspect of the
Question I have specially avoided.
I am the Medical Officer not the
Chaplain. He ~~sutor~~ ultra
crepidans.